



Missionary Prayer Intention - The Pope's Missionary Prayer intention for November 2006: "For believers everywhere: may they work to remove old and new barriers to Africa's development". Comment by Cardinal Peter Turkson, Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana

Vatican City (Fides Service) - In 1994, at the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, the rest of the Universal Church joined the African Church to take a candid, but a sympathetic look at the African continent, as it stood at the threshold of the third millennium. At the end of the Synod, the Synod Fathers, in their "Message" (Nuntius), and later the Holy Father, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, addressed "Goodnews", a "message of hope" to Africa.

Africa, to which the Synod-message of hope was addressed, was Africa, which the Synod had described as "a continent full of bad news". The Synod bemoaned and regretted that Africa was full of problems. Misery, wars and despair were everywhere; and Africa did appear to be an irrelevant appendix to the world, often forgotten and neglected (cfr. *Ecclesia in Africa*, §40). This, indeed, is the mirror-image of a continent, which is hindered by several factors: historical, cultural and attitudinal, political, natural, macro-economic etc., from discovering the true path to development and peace. It is an image of Africa, deprived by these factors of those experiences, which the Synod identified as "virtues of evangelization", namely: hope, peace, joy, harmony, love and unity (cfr. *Ecclesia in Africa*, §40).

Geographically, Africa's neighbour is the Arab world; and historically, it would be the first to enslave Africans. The introduction of African slaves to Europe was through the intermediary of Arabs; although, the subsequent debilitating drain of Africa's manpower base through slavery would be at the hands of Europeans (cfr. *Unesco History of Africa IV*, [ed. D.T. Niane, Berkeley 1984] 651). Later, as a colonial power in Africa, Europe would also farm out Africa among its nations, establishing arbitrary national borders. Within the borders created by colonial powers, "the coexistence of ethnic groups with different traditions, languages.... often meets with obstacles arising from serious mutual hostility. Tribal oppositions at times endanger if not peace, at least the pursuit of common good of the society (cfr. *Ecclesia in Africa* §49).

Very many of the colonial administrations were succeeded by ill-prepared and ill-equipped African leaders, who ruled by force and trampled under foot the rights of their citizens. As a result, there were in many African nations abject poverty, tragic mismanagement of available scarce resources, political instability and social disorientation (cfr. *Ecclesia in Africa*, § 40). Africa's culture is rich in its diversity; and it enshrines some of the noblest values of human existence, such as its love for life, the cherished sense of belongingness, which families represent, an acute sense of solidarity and community life. But the traditional place and treatment of women in several cultures and societies are rather dismissive. The denial of women's rights and the dismissal of their economic and political potentialities amount to a disregard of a significant economic force, which is capable of changing the economic life of African communities. These traditional and historical woes of Africa are aggravated by several other modern and new afflictions. Globalization and its free market policy is a despicable menace to Africa's emerging industrialization and productivity. Trade imbalances and donor "conditionalities" stifle auto-determination and local initiatives. The increasing polarization between the West (Christian?) and the Arab (Islamic?) worlds places Black Africa in the shadow of a religious conflict. To crown it all is the HIV-AIDS pandemic, which is fiercely decimating Africa's virile population and manpower, leaving in its wake helpless orphans and a diseased population. As a result of these various factors and many more, several African nations are still in the grip of disease and famine, war, racial and tribal tensions, political instability and violation of human rights (cfr. *Ecclesia in Africa*, §51). Africa in the throes of misery and poverty was likened to the victim in the parable of the "Good Samaritan" (Lk.10:30-37) by the Synod. Like the brutalized victim in the parable, the Synod believed that Africa needs the attention and the help of "good Samaritan" figures to survive.

The hand of a “good Samaritan” has already been extended to Africa by the Church. In her poverty, the African Church plays a leading role in several countries, spearheading programs, which aim at integral human development, to the admiration and praise of their governments and international agencies. The meagre efforts of local churches are supplemented and strengthened by Christians and other faith-based organizations, who provide assistance with health care, research into tropical diseases, which plague the continent, and the rolling back of hitherto endemic diseases (small pox, guinea worm, polio etc.). Various Catholic development agencies complement the efforts of development offices of national Episcopal conferences to mount literacy and good governance programs, agriculture and food security projects, and to facilitate the acquisition of basic skills and technologies. There is also NEPAD and the Millennium Development Account, which are international donor agencies’ initiatives to promote accelerated growth and development in Africa.

The emerging and increasing resolve of African governments and statesmen to be accountable, to eschew bribery and corruption, to exercise responsible stewardship with public property and to promote tribal integration is very supportive of the very many external efforts to “catapult” Africa into a new orbit of improved sanitation, economic freedom, food security, development, growth, security and peace. It is our prayer too that the huge, faceless, but global (multi-national) organizations would, like Zacchaeus in the Gospel (Lk.19:8), gradually recognize that Africans are brothers to be in solidarity with, and not to be abused and exploited for profit. Cardinal Peter Turkson (Agenzia Fides 28/10/2006; righe 75, parole 974)